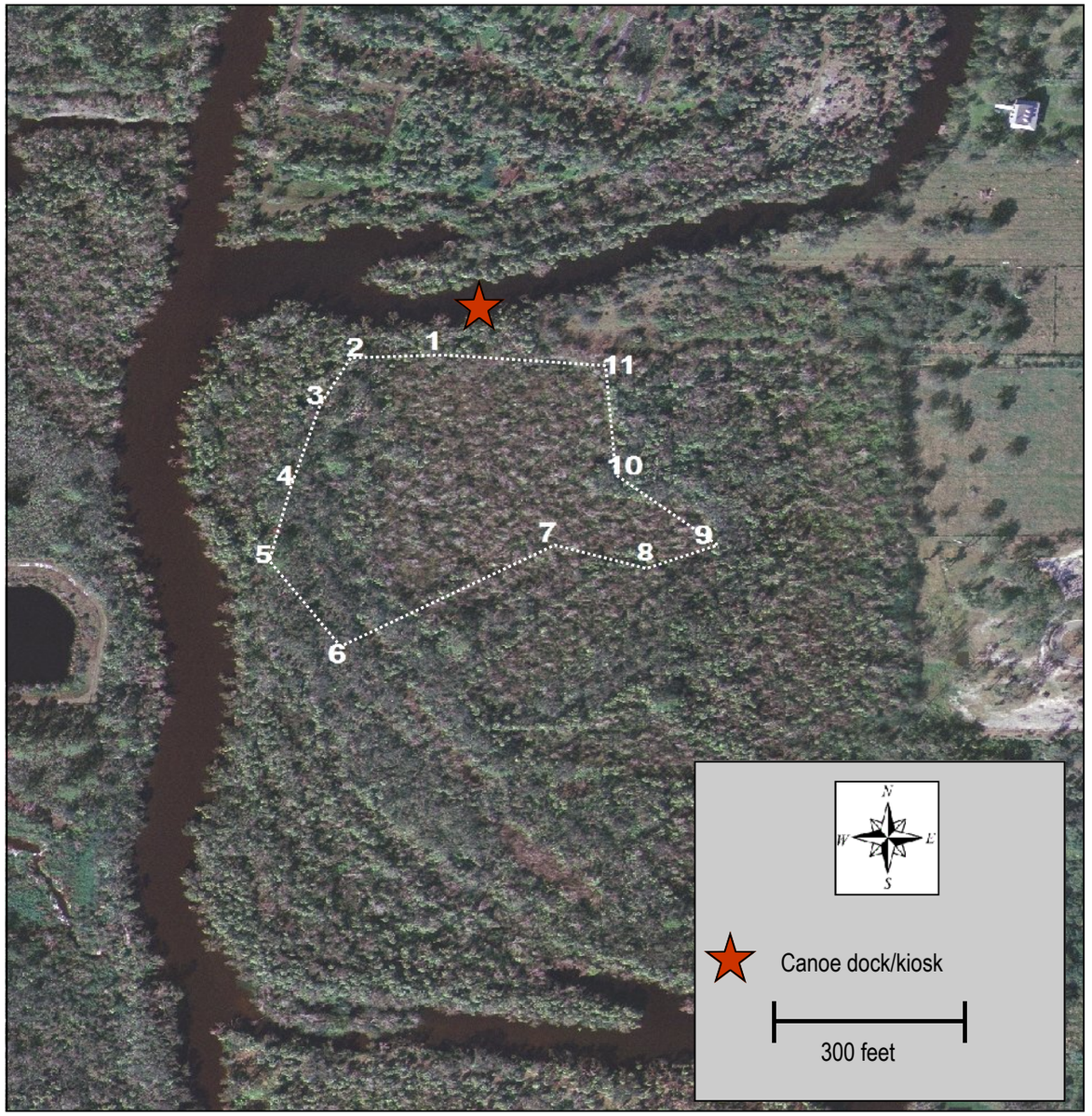

Be sure to visit other Environmentally Significant Lands along the North Fork by picking up a copy of the North Fork St. Lucie River Paddling Map.

Safety tips

Trails are uneven; please use at your own risk.

While hiking the trail you may encounter animals indigenous to this area. Please observe from a safe distance, and remember you are in their habitat.

For your own safety:

- Please remain on the trails.
- Carry an adequate amount of drinking water. There is no potable water on site.
- In case of lightning, seek a low area away from trees, fence lines and tall objects.
- In case of emergency, call 911.
- This site is only accessible by canoe/kayak. Coordinates of dock are: W 80° 20' 44.6", N 27° 21' 44.0"

Funding for the acquisition of this site was provided by Florida Communities Trust's Preservation 2000 Program and the St. Lucie County Environmentally Significant Lands Program

Captain Hammond's Hammock

Captain Hammond's Hammock is a 34 acre site situated on the North Fork of the St. Lucie River.
A 1/2 mile long interpretive trail takes you through floodplain forest, hydric hammock and along floodplain swamp.

Environmental Resources Department

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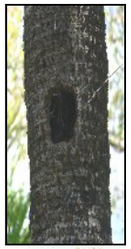
1. Sabal/Cabbage Palm (*Sabal palmetto)*



"Hammock" is an early Native American word that translates to "shady place". Hammocks are classified as forested wetlands that are dominated by hardwood trees such as Live Oaks and Sabal/ Cabbage Palms. Our state tree can be found in several ecosystems including upland habitats such as hammocks and flatwoods, but also can grow in swamps, marshes and wet prairie due to its high water tolerance. You might be able to see a difference in the trunk among individual trees. Some trees have a smooth trunk, while others still possess boot jacks, or frond bases. As the tree matures, these jacks drop off, leaving the tree with a smooth trunk. As you continue, be on the lookout for cavities made in the trunks of the Cabbage Palm, such as the rectangular ones often excavated by Pileated Woodpeckers.

2. Swamp Bay

(Persea palustris)

Like other Bays, the leaves of this species are aromatic when crushed and have been used to flavor foods. This species can be differentiated by the similar Red Bay by the presence of rusty hairs along the midrib on the underside of the leaf and along the stems. Galls, swollen structures created by insects for food and brooding purposes, are often present on Bays. Along with the Red Bay, the leaves of this plant are eaten by certain Swallowtail butterfly caterpillars, including the Palamedes. It is thought that this plant species might be susceptible to a fungus carried by the Redbay Ambrosia Beetle introduced from Asia that is damaging the Red Bay.

3. Ecotone

You may notice you are standing between two different looking ecosystems. To your left, the significant change in elevation supports flatwoods vegetation such as slash pine trees and saw palmetto. The much lower elevation to your right supports wetland vegetation. The "ecotone" is the edge of these 2 different natural community types. In Florida, just a small change in elevation can make a world of difference in the ecosystem types that occur. Ecotones usually blend into each other and are very important for wildlife, as they are able to exploit different ecosystems within a short distance of each other for food and shelter. As such, the greatest diversity of animal species is often found within ecotones.

4. Saw Palmetto

(*Serenoa repens*)

This shrub comprises the majority of the understory in pine flatwoods ecosystems. The stem usually grows horizontal to or under the ground, but occasionally will grow more upright. These upright palmettos are often referred to as "gatorbacks". Named for the saw-like teeth along its stem, this plant has adaptations for living in a sometimes harsh environment. In addition to having thick, waxy leaves, the vertical growth of the leaves allows for less exposure to the hot noontime sun. The fibrous trunk helps protect it from fire, and is one of the first plants to sprout back just days afterwards. This is an important plant to Florida's wildlife. Bear, deer, raccoons, opossums, foxes, gopher tortoises and birds eat the berries it produces. Mammals including panther, bear and deer birth their young under its cover, and many birds use the fibers for nesting material. The berries are also valuable to humans for medicinal purposes.

5. S. FL Slash Pine

(Pinus elliotii var. densa)

The dominant canopy tree in pine flatwoods ecosystems, this variety of the Slash Pine is adapted to living in this region and also adapted to fire, a natural disturbance that keeps this ecosystem in check. These pines, not only useful to wildlife, have also been very valuable to people. Slash Pine is named for the slashes created when resins were extracted to create turpentine. It also has been very valuable as a timber source. Early cultures ate the inner bark, seeds and needles, sap was used as a salve and an adhesive, and the wood was used, just like today, to create a variety of products. Some of the pines on this site have been here a long time, and are characterized by the bare, "lighter" branches usually found on the lower levels of the trunk. These dead "lighter" branches have a very high resin content and are very flammable.

6. Red Maple *(Acer rubrum)*

The Red Maple is one of the most widely distributed trees in North America, as it can thrive in a variety of habitats. In Florida, this deciduous tree known for its fall foliage is most commonly found along riverbanks and swamps, but can be found on more upland sites as well. This versatility is due to its ability to produce roots to suit its site from a young age. In wet locations, red maple seedlings produce short taproots with long and developed lateral roots, while on dry sites, they develop long taproots with significantly shorter lateral roots. Pioneers used the tannin extracted from the tree to make dyes used on linens, hats, and shoes. Maple syrup can be extracted from the red maple in very small quantities. The wood of red maple is soft and may be used for smaller materials such as clothes hangers, clothespins, box veneer, interior finish, and some types of furniture. It is currently thought that the pre-European forests of eastern North America contained far fewer red maples than at present. Most diversity surveys conducted in eastern forests showed the red maple representing under 5% of all tree species and was mostly confined to poorly drained areas. However, the density of the trees in many of these areas has increased. A series of disturbances to the oak and pine forests since European arrival, including the suppression of forest fires, are most likely responsible for this phenomenon. This ongoing spread of the Red Maple is changing the nature of eastern forests by reducing the number of oaks and pines that would otherwise dominate.

7. Live Oak

(*Quercus virginiana*)

Common in hydric hammock ecosystems, this species is named for its longevity, reaching upwards of 300 years old. It is slow growing, with about a 1.5 inch growth in circumference each year. Trees have been reported with a branch spread of more than 150 feet and a trunk of 30 ft. or more. The acorns produced by these trees provide food for squirrels and birds, and also helped to sustain early peoples. Its strong wood was a vital part of wooden ship construction. It was reported that by 1832, almost all merchantable live oak within hauling distance had been cut to build ships. The branches serve as a substrate for a variety of plants including Resurrection Ferns, Butterfly Orchids, airplants such as *Tillandsia* spp., Golden Polyplody fern, mosses and lichens. How many different plant species can you see on its limbs?

8. Floodplain Swamp

Floodplain swamps are ecosystems that are associated with rivers and streams, and, as the name implies, are influenced by flood events. Floodplain swamps are flooded for the majority of the year. The St. Lucie River is special in that is has a lot of floodplain forest and swamp remaining. Floodplains are important natural communities that help alleviate the effects of flooding and provide important habitat for many animal and plant species. While we think of floods being a detrimental occurrence, they are a natural process and help redistribute detritus, or decaying organic matter, to other parts of the floodplain or into the main river channel.

One common plant species in Floodplain Swamps is the **Giant Leather fern** *(Acrostichum danaeifolium).* True to its name, this fern grows quite tall, over 10 feet in wet conditions. It received its name from the brown spores that cover the underside of fertile fronds, appearing and feeling like suede leather. Like many other fern species, the young unfurled fronds, or fiddleheads, have been eaten by people for a long time. Seminoles made an infusion of this plant and rubbed it on their bodies to reduce high fevers. This species is used in other countries for thatching roofs in houses.

9. Wax myrtle

(Myrica cerifera)

Wax myrtle has aromatic leaves when crushed, and were used by early native peoples and pioneers as a natural insect repellant. Wax from the berries was and is currently still used to make candles and soap. The fruits of this plant are important to native birds, especially warblers and other migratory species.

10. Laurel Oak *(Quercus laurifolia)*

Unllike the long-lived Live Oak, the Laurel Oak is shorter lived, only reaching a lifespan of up to about 70 years. Also in contrast to the Live Oak, it is a fast growing tree. When young, the bark of the Laurel oak is rather smooth, then later develops shallow fissures with rough edges. This species usually grows scattered with other hardwoods in well-drained hammocks near the edges of streams and rivers. In Florida, it can also be found in flatwoods and moderately well drained soils. This oak produces large crops of acorns regularly. It is an important wildlife food resource for deer, raccoons, turkeys, ducks, quail, birds, squirrels and other rodents.

11. Citrus

This area was used for citrus cultivation, which was common along Ten Mile Creek and the North Fork of the St. Lucie River. However, what was quite common was not necessarily healthy for the waterways in terms of runoff. Today, efforts are being made to protect the watershed and restore the natural communities of and along the St. Lucie River, this area's most valuable natural treasure.

(The trail continues to the left to return to the kiosk/dock.)